

Connections to Chemistry – Ten Years and Going Strong!

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College/university and non-academic chemists stay current by reading research journals and attending conferences and meetings. The options for high-school chemistry teachers are much more limited, due to time, finances, rewards, and opportunities. The late Representative Tip O'Neill was famously quoted as saying, "All politics is local." There is nothing more local in the ACS than the Local Section, and thus the professional development of high school teachers should be of major concern to each Local Section.

New England provides many professional development opportunities for high-school chemistry teachers. Schools and school districts, as well as colleges and universities offer an assortment of programs. Teachers can also attend occasional regional meetings of the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) and meetings and summer conferences of the New England Association of Chemistry Teachers (NEACT). Other resources are provided by the Massachusetts Association of Science Supervisors (MASS), the Massachusetts Association of Science Teachers (MAST), and the Network of Educators in Science and Technology (NEST).

In 1999, the Education Committee of the Northeastern Section of the American Chemical Society took a close look at these various opportunities, and felt that the American Chemical Society should be highly visible as an important resource for the teachers' professional development. The original group proposed an afternoon/evening weekday meeting for high-school chemistry teachers in New England. The event would be organized and sponsored by NESACS and would provide a connection to the extensive education resources and materials of the ACS and the Division of Chemical Education (CHED) for high-school chemistry teachers. It would include workshops on chemistry content, pedagogy, and National Chemistry Week activities. Ideally, it would be scheduled early in the academic year, at an easily accessible location, and would provide teachers with professional development credits.

The first *Connections to Chemistry* event was held on Thursday, October 19, 2000 from 3:30-8:00 PM at Burlington (MA) High School. In attendance were 100 participants from 72 different high schools in all six New England states. The day began with registration, refreshments, and a welcome, followed by two 45-minute sessions of four hands-on workshops. The four workshops were: "National Chemistry Week: Kitchen Chemistry"; "Integrating ACS Computer Resources into the High School Curriculum"; "Experiment with the ACS: Chem Matters, ChemCom, Journal of Chemical Education;" and "Chemists to Classrooms: Connecting Industrial Chemists with High School Chemistry Teachers."

Then came dinner and a keynote address, given by Michael Tinneland, Head of K-12 Sciences, ACS Education Division. The evening ended with door prizes and give-away of

educational materials, including affiliate memberships to NESACS and CHED, ACS logo products (mouse pads, T- shirts, mugs), ACS Education Division CDs, software, and magazines, and four subscriptions to the *Journal of Chemical Education*.

All participants received professional development credits, for only a \$10 registration fee (which included dinner and materials).

The event was extremely favor- ably received by all participants; essentially all would consider attending another conference in the future and would recommend it to a colleague. Comments on evaluation forms included, “I regret that I could not attend all four workshops.” “This was very informative and worth my time.” and “Nothing but gratitude for thinking of us.”

NESACS has been providing high-school teachers with *Connections to Chemistry* for ten years now, and planning is underway for *Connections XI*. The program has grown every year. Because of laboratory space limitations, the attendee limit is now set at 150, with at least one-third of those being repeat attendees. Some workshops have been so popular as to warrant repeating. Within NESACS, there is an almost unlimited supply of workshop leaders and keynote speakers, which is fortunate, as there is a great demand for this event among the high-school teachers in the area. The registration fee is now \$18; this includes workshop and program-related materials, dinner, a one-year subscription to ChemMatters, and a certificate for three hours of Professional Development credit.

With ten years of unqualified success, popularity, and proven worth to high school chemistry teachers within New England, *Connections to Chemistry* is expected to continue to thrive for the foreseeable future, and we hope to write another update to celebrate *Connections XV* in 2015!